

13. Viridiana

The biography of Buñuel does not end, however, with this amiable portrait of a man withdrawn to his Mexican retreat, adapted, Americanized, in permanent exile. He is too Spanish and too much a rebel not to strike a blow to assert his lasting ties to his fatherland. Slight as it is, Buñuel's Spanish production was our only cinema worthy of the name. Consisting of the two Surrealist films made in France, the two documentaries and the four unsigned comedies, this little group was nevertheless enough to indicate the possible triple direction of a Spanish cinema.

At the 1960 Cannes Film Festival, a group of Spaniards, among them the young Carlos Saura, director of *Los golfos* – a production of Films 59 which was Spain's official Festival entry – met with Buñuel and discussed the importance from every point of view of his returning to make a film in his native country. He would find the fundamental themes, the landscapes, the people and the problems of his country, to which he had always remained faithful in his work. The key to Buñuel remained his *Spanishness*, in the sight of the world. His return would be of special significance for those inside Spain who were struggling to give the cinema a national character. Spain still had an abundant production; but it had not yet found a national personality. To find a tradition was, in the Spanish idiom, like looking for three feet on a cat. Our

culture has hardly ever maintained a logical character or continuity. It has been created in leaps, by sporadic feats of genius. Today, as so often in the past, we had to build a bridge over the post-war hiatus, cultural and therefore moral. The generation of 1960 had to create its own continuity with the second and third decades of the century. It is easy enough to do this with the wealth of works of exile literature, essay and thought that have been left to us; but in the cinema we have little but Buñuel. This was the gist of our discussions in Cannes. Buñuel said to me at that time, 'I know that as a good patriot I have to return to Spain and help; but maybe I am not a good patriot. I am tired and too old to begin something else there.' Such a pessimistic expression is in him no more than the reflection of a momentary depression in a man who is all energy. A few months later a correspondence began between him and his producers, which ultimately led to the production of *Viridiana*. In a letter to Pedro Portabella, of Films 59 (who were eventually only nominally co-producers of the film; the effective producer was UNINCI), Buñuel talked about the script of the film, which he had to prepare in principle as a Mexican production. He thought it suitable for Spain, since 'it could pass for a white film, although I must say it is full of darker intentions'. He summarized the story in a few words, and, professional as always, predicted that the audience would burst into applause in the sequence of the beggars' orgy, brilliant and effective as it would be.

By December 1960 Buñuel was installed in the capital, on the seventeenth floor of the Torre de Madrid. He was very happy. In Cannes he had said that he feared to come back to 'his city' to find it empty of the friends he had known, with the cafes and their marble tables replaced by self-service cafeterias, and everything changed. He did not, however, remain defeated by nostalgia. He told me that he thought Madrid splendid, much better than before. He still found his old cafes and his old friends. In Calle Victor Pradera, in the Café Viena, he became the centre of a circle, with a happy mixture of the survivors of his generation, those who like him had come back (the composer Pittaluga, José Bergamín, the essayist and maker of entomological films Guillermo Zuniga, the actor Francisco Rabal and others) and the people of the new generation, of whom he strongly approved. After Cannes he had written to his family, 'If Spanish youth is like those I have met here, then Spain is getting better.' In Madrid he gave no press interviews, but was at pains to receive, with rapt attention, the young independent critics, students of the cinema school, debutant directors.

For two months he did nothing but rest, and quietly plan the technical and artistic personnel of the film and the exterior locations. Buñuel knows admirably how to 'waste' time. We helped him to instal his Christmas 'Crib' in the apartment of the modern block. A bright and vulgar 'crib', such as a

devout Madrilene might have, but full of anachronisms and inappropriate figures, creating shocking scenes (the 'dislocation of place' characteristic of Spanish Surrealism). His sister Conchita looked after him until his wife and Juan Luis arrived. He visited Zaragoza, to see his family, Las Hurdes, 'his' Toledo which he had loved from student days, when he had visited it every Saturday. He celebrated a very Spanish Christmas: 'It is a festival which I like a great deal, like all traditional festivals, with its intimacy, its fire and its other symbols.'

Shooting of *Viridiana* began on 4 February 1961. 'It is the first time I have had such freedom since I made *L'Age d'or*,' he told me in an interview for my correspondent's notes in *Sight and Sound*. 'Do you know', he added, not without irony, 'that *Viridiana* is the story of an Italian saint of the sixteenth century?' Effectively, Buñuel had unlimited freedom for the realization of his script. Economically, naturally, he was restricted. The budget of five million or so pesetas (finally the film cost six million) did not seem a great deal when compared with the 480 million for *King of Kings*, which was then shooting in the Spanish studios; but it was a very large sum compared with anything that Buñuel was accustomed to. 'If you had the millions of *King of Kings*,' he was asked, 'how many good films could you make?' 'If I had all that money, I would throw Franco out of Spain,' he replied. Awareness of his own value



Directing *Viridiana*; Aguayo at the camera

does not prevent almost comic gestures of sincere modesty. 'Imagine,' he said, with no touch of sarcasm; 'Nicholas Ray (the director of *King of Kings*) came to see me at home and told me that he admired my work a lot. Such an important man, and so rich! I say to myself, so I'm worth something after all!'

Viridiana progressed rapidly. The crew was partly composed of the same young technicians as *Los golfos* – a well-made film, though nothing indicated it as coming from the same group as *Viridiana*. Buñuel won from the actors interpretations not only superior to anything being done in Spain – and in most other countries for that matter. He did not seek stars; 'Stars are always horrible,' he told me. With the ability which every good director has for mimicry, he gave me a humorous impression of Simone Signoret, perhaps the most intelligent and sympathetic star in all his career. 'As we were shooting, she called me to her side and said in a very low voice: "Don Luis, how would it be if, to demonstrate my impatience, I tapped with my foot on the leg of the table, like this?" "Yes, my dear: do it as you like." ' Silvia Pinal, an actress popular in Mexico, particularly in comedy, and the wife of Gustavo Alatraste, a Mexican who gave money to the young Spanish companies, proved to be a remarkably docile and accommodating actress in the role of Viridiana. The group of beggars composed one of the most picturesque and pathetically human conglomerations the cinema had ever seen. Buñuel cast them one by one: two of them were non-professionals, an authentic beggar and a dwarf vendor of lottery tickets. Never has the atmosphere of a film been more cordial. I cannot resist introducing a personal note: a witnessed day of shooting on *Viridiana*.

23 March 1961

At 8.15 in the morning I met Buñuel at the Plaza Cafeteria. Luis told me to be punctual; if I arrived late he would leave without me. When I arrived, Luis, his wife and his son were already waiting there.

Buñuel seemed very fresh, more so than in the evenings. He was full of energy. No one would guess his sicknesses due to sugar deficiency, or his age – 61 years and 24 days.

It was drizzling. Very worried I asked Juan Luis if it would spoil the plan.

'We shoot despite the rain,' he answered. 'Didn't you notice the rain scene in the false miracle sequence of *La Dolce Vita*? The ground was completely dry; the impression of the rain was given by the movement of the mass and some drops of water falling in front of the camera. The contrary can happen. With a couple of good lights, and the actors behaving normally under the rain, nobody believes that it is raining. That is the suggestive power of the cinema. In the scene of the labour conflict in *Nazarin* we began in sun and finished in rain. No one in the audience has ever noticed.

'It is true that the sequence looks greyer. But people think that is an intentional dramatic effect. There are a lot of things in the cinema like that.'

Buñuel finished his breakfast. We got into a hire car which took us all. We went towards Cienpozuelos. It was the last day of locations. The following day there were three takes to be done in Toledo. After that the shooting would be finished.

In the car Buñuel told me how he had bought old clothes in the flea market and had bargained with some gypsies under a bridge at Manzanares, offering them new clothes in exchange for the ones they were wearing, and then disinfecting the garments and putting them on the actors . . .

Buñuel's wife is still very beautiful. Now more than fifty, she keeps that surpassing simplicity of a French woman of character. On this occasion she was as happy as a girl. I asked her if being the wife of Luis Buñuel had not placed her in strange situations sometimes, as the wife of an artist whose films revealed so much violence, cruelty, aberration and sadism.

'Oh yes, often. During the shooting of *Los Olvidados* the Mexicans clustered round me, gazing compassionately. "Poor soul!" they said.'

We arrived at the village. The plaza, the old two-storey buildings, the square, rudimentary arcades. Spain is full of undiscovered marvels. I asked how they had found the place.

'I travelled about in this car for five days', said Buñuel, 'and took notes on the villages which I saw between here and Alicante. Then I made the selection of images which best framed the action. The exteriors of the estate of Viridiana's uncle were filmed at La Moraleja, an estate belonging to the Marqués de Usia; and there were two days shooting at El Pardo, only a kilometre from the palace of Generalissimo Franco.'

We got out of the car at the Plaza Mayor. It was full of bearded men who looked at us curiously. No doubt they already knew that we had come to shoot there. As it was raining, the country people had all morning free to be spectators . . . and they hoped to earn ten duros by being extras.

The production manager, Quintana, selected thirty of them rapidly – 'Buñuel types'.

'How hideous these men are!' exclaimed Buñuel's wife.

'Compared with Mexicans they are beauties,' replied Buñuel. 'In Mexico I have seen the ugliest men in the world. These have interesting heads, and above all, eyes.'

Buñuel's precise observation is the observation of an anthropologist rather than an aesthete.

He had meanwhile left us, and was looking at the square from different angles. His decision is very rapid. For Buñuel, to find the angle and the framing is one of the fundamental tasks of direction. It is very rarely a

problem to him. He is one of the privileged directors who can discover the most expressive composition from simple good sense.

Two lorries arrived with the lights, electrical gear and such accessories as a very modern camera. Then a bus loaded with thirty technical personnel.

A little later, Silvia Pinal. As she got out of the car, so dainty, pale and blonde, the villagers at once identified her as the star. She went with the make-up artists to an old decaying building which was in fact the seat of the Falange Española Tradicionalista and of the JONS. The make-up people put a base on and Silvia, with an assistant hairdresser, finished her own very simple make-up. Buñuel does not camouflage his artists; and neither Silvia nor her lips were painted. The other characters had no make-up at all. The crew, extremely disciplined, had rapidly positioned the lights, one on a tower, and set the rails for the dolly within the arcade. Already they were trying the lights. Everything seemed extremely simple. The villagers evidently were beginning to feel cheated.

'This must be a very bad and very cheap film,' one of the more knowing country people told me. 'You should have seen when the *King of Kings* Americans came. They really had some apparatus. And they took more than a thousand people from the fields and gave us thirty duros a day for four days just for putting on some short skirts and watching the passion of Our Lord.'

Juan Luis, very active, was finishing off details. Aguayo, the director of photography, was trying out a travelling shot with Silvia Pinal, who impassively obeyed, munching an anchovy sandwich the while. Buñuel, sitting in the director's chair, was concentrating hard and not talking to anyone. A wretched bus, like the one in *Bienvenido Mr Marshall!*, arrived, depositing eight village 'extras', laden with baskets, as well as the driver and Mrs Buñuel, who had crept inside with the driver because she was cold outside. Thus she is immortalized in the film!

They began to shoot. Today's scene seemed simple. There were two shots. In the first, Viridiana goes to catch the bus in the Plaza Mayor of the village, buys a ticket and is just about to enter when . . . In the second shot a policeman and two civil guards are seen looking for her to tell her of the death of her uncle and to take her off with them . . .

Buñuel mounted the dolly and tried out the travelling shot before the camera. Then he sat in the director's chair and ordered them to film the scene. He had given no instruction or rehearsal to the actress. I supposed that the instructions had been given in advance. On the other hand, he had occupied himself very diligently with the framing and the movement of the camera. This is characteristic of the director. This apparently very simple shot was, in reality, very complicated. It was astonishing how, almost without effort, it was finished. The shot begins with the camera arranged at the distance of a medium shot over the actress, who is looking out on to the square from

Directing the 'simple shot' for *Viridiana*

behind a column of the portico. She frowns when she sees the bus coming; then takes her bag and begins to go forward. Thus Buñuel has given us in a very cinematic – that is, elliptical – form, the arrival of the bus. After this very beautiful shot (it has the function of a close-up) the camera recedes, showing the upper half of Viridiana, and effecting the travelling shot. This too is clever because the spectator first sees an advance of the protagonist, emphasized by the columns which recede behind her. The travelling shot ends, and the camera, fixed, shoots the actress withdrawing from it to enter the bus. Thus we get an impression of 'going away', of departure. Moreover in these seconds there is something of performance: during the travelling shot, the actress's way of walking and the sorrowful expression of her face reveal the gravity of the moment through which she is passing. Now we are also given a hint of her fragility and her defencelessness; as she goes down the step with her wide skirts and pathetic gestures, so pale and blonde, she gives the impression of taking a step into an abyss. A man comes into the shot and helps her down this step; then she faces the conductor, has a brief conversation with him and buys her ticket. The shot was taken silent. In the studio the dialogue would be dubbed on, no doubt: 'How much is a ticket?' Reply: 'So much.'

At this moment, Buñuel, a metre away, called 'Cut!' And he added: 'The dialogue was too long.' The take was made again, exactly as before, with this ending a little shortened. The script-girl noted in her book '27 metres'. It was the total film that had been used. We saw the ease and economy with which the shot had been done. Given its complexity, a script and direction less skilled would have made endless shots and takes. Buñuel controlled the filming precisely, despite his apparent inaction; and was exigent over each detail. The legends about his indifference, and that he only makes single takes are total misapprehensions. No doubt he makes only a single take for the majority of his shots – a notably better ratio than most directors. Yet in quite a different mood from the hysteria of many Hollywood directors, Buñuel is quite capable of repeating a shot many times (cf. the take of Cobo in *Los Olvidados* already mentioned).

In the nearby tavern Buñuel answered my queries: 'Well, these shots are quite uncomplicated. They don't call for any worry.'

Later Quintana came in. 'This man is great. Every day of shooting makes me more aware of it. He simplifies everything to mathematical precision. Where other directors would get into a great muddle, shouting and making all sorts of scenes, he resolves the problem with no fuss; and, moreover, films exactly what has to be filmed. Out of a thousand possibilities, he infallibly chooses the best.'

This recalls a critical observation by Basil Wright, writing in *Sight and Sound*: 'Buñuel does not choose the best angle; he chooses the obvious one and the only one.'

The next take confirmed this. The police, followed by the civil guards, approach Viridiana. Naturally this take does not repeat the previous travelling shot, even though the movement of the characters through the portico is similar. The camera takes them from a position in which it was left at the end of the previous set-up, where it has filmed the movement of the protagonist from inside the portico – pan – to the bus. Only the placing has been moved two or three metres further outside. From this point it shoots them arriving, like the bullfighter waiting for the bull.

Now we could understand the director's point in interrupting the over-long dialogue at the bus: it was in anticipation of the transition. The police whom we see come from behind the heavy columns, come towards Viridiana and have a brief dialogue with her. They take her back, and they all return by exactly the same route as she came. In the first take the camera was placed within the portico, so that we see the protagonist approaching us, rounding the rural architecture, going out into the square to the open air, preparing to depart in the bus. Plastically, it gives the impression of *departure*. On the other hand, in the second take, linked by the transition, the framing is the

opposite. From the *outside*, in the square and the open air, we see the police arrive from the shadowy interior. The columns which previously provided a background for the woman, are now in front of the men. She had light behind her, they darkness. All this gives a certain impression of sinister contrast. Seeing them return the way they came, we have the impression of a routine. Shooting from the rear and withdrawing from the backs gives the finality of the shot (very marked because it is the end of the sequence) a pathos already classic in the cinema: Chaplin used the effect frequently. The civil guards with their cloaks and shiny tricorns, taking off the protagonist and seen from the rear, compose a very Spanish image, recalling Garcia Lorca. This admirable montage contrast vindicates Eisenstein's view: 'The maximum pathetic effect is obtained by giving a leap in the opposite direction.' Here it is achieved with a simple change of camera position and lights. Finally, the modest use of extras in the scene is treated in a very sensitive manner – it is not too much to say poetically. In the first shot we see in the distance behind Viridiana, at the far end of the square, a couple of groups of people, gossiping interminably, very characteristic of Spanish villages. This static element reinforces the dramatic action. They remain while she departs. In the second shot, a little boy reads a comic, leaning against a pillar behind which the police pass. When they are taking Viridiana away a self-contented country couple pass, walking quietly by with their shopping basket. The audience doesn't even notice all this (the whole scene lasts a matter of fifty seconds); nevertheless it reinforces the dramatic composition in the spectator's subconscious.

The scene was finished, everything packed up in a moment, everyone paid and the unit on its way home. The locals dispersed. It was three hours since we had arrived. The rest of the day was free. The rain had slacked off. The sun was beginning to break through. Buñuel had the whole afternoon to himself, with his family, and an Italian novel he had begun. He can give the impression of a lazy life which the great creators often manage to convey. No one would have guessed that he had filmed a scene for a film which would become history.

The plot of the film gives no idea of the deep subversion latent in its expression in images, as realized by Buñuel. This is why the script was approved without any problems. Thus we reprint below the original synopsis as it was printed in the publicity leaflet issued by UNINCI for the Cannes Film Festival. The reader who wants a fuller account can read the complete script with its marvellous dialogue, although the scenes of the beggars have inevitably lost much in translation. (See Bibliography):

Don Jaime, an old Spanish *hidalgo*, has lived in retirement on an abandoned farm since the death of his wife thirty years ago on their

wedding night. He is visited by his niece Viridiana, a novice in a convent, who bears an extraordinary resemblance to his wife. She has come to take her final farewell of her uncle before taking the veil. In face of the resemblance, Don Jaime falls passionately in love with Viridiana, but neither his prayers nor his proposals of marriage can persuade her to stay with him. One night, the last before her departure, Don Jaime persuades Viridiana to put on her aunt's wedding dress, and with the collusion of Ramona, the servant, pours a drug into her coffee and tries to ravish her; but at the last moment stops himself. The next day he admits to Viridiana what has happened, and she leaves, horrified. As she is catching the bus which will take her back to the convent, she learns that her uncle has just hanged himself from a tree . . .

Viridiana returns to the farm of Don Jaime; for the moment she will not return to the convent. She feels she is to blame for the death of her uncle, and wants to make expiation. In the farm there is also Jorge, Don Jaime's natural son, and Lucia, the woman with whom he lives. Viridiana devotes herself to charitable works, welcoming beggars and installing them in the house. Jorge wants to organize everything, so that the farm can become productive and life resume its course. There are soon differences between them because of their different ways of life. Jorge would like to throw out the beggars; he finds all this useless and absurd, while Viridiana welcomes them more and more and increases the sacrifices of her hermit's existence. The relationship between them is distant, strange.

Lucia, faced with Jorge's behaviour, leaves him, vaguely jealous of Viridiana.

One day Jorge and Viridiana have to go to town on business. The beggars, believing that they will not return till morning, take the house by storm and organize a great feast. They eat, drink, dance, make love . . . The wedding veil of Don Jaime's bride serves as fancy dress for one of them, the cupboards are empty, the house becomes an incredible orgy . . . Jorge and Viridiana return unexpectedly, and the beggars flee to the village. Two remain, however, and while Ramona goes to seek help, try to rape Viridiana, after having overpowered Jorge. Jorge asks one of the beggars to kill the other, offering him money to do so; and thus succeeds in saving Viridiana.

Peace restored, Jorge plays cards with Ramona, with whom he is having an affair. Viridiana tries, in vain, to resume her life of prayer and sacrifice. She goes into Jorge's room, afraid and distressed. Ramona wants to go away, to leave them alone together, but Jorge will not let her. He invites Viridiana to sit down with them, and all three resume the interrupted game of cards.



Viridiana beside 'the crown of thorns, the nails and the hammer of the Crucifixion ...'

Viridiana proved to be one of Buñuel's most brilliant and graceful films. Its plot has the same melodrama characteristics and the same multiplicity of episodes as the Mexican films; although his producers gave him total freedom for the first time since *L'Age d'or*, Buñuel did not launch himself on a radically different style. There is nothing anti-commercial about the film, though of course its realization is more successful than that of the Mexican films as Buñuel has been able to take particular care in his *mise en scène*. Canet's art direction shows a great advance over *El*: the settings of Don Jaime's mansion are costly, heavy, lugubrious, *fin-de-siècle*, mouldy, pretentious – in short bourgeois – and play the same important psychological role as the hero's house in *El*. The sound-track uses a lot of music, though Buñuel has not broken with his determination not to use 'background' music. Everything we hear belongs to the action, played by the actors on a harmonium or on a gramophone.

An unusual technique for Buñuel is the use of an artificial montage in the style of the Soviet silent cinema: shots of Viridiana and the beggars kneeling in the fields and orating the Angelus alternate with shots of workmen labouring to pull a cart of gravel, chopping wood and so on. A scene in no way blasphemous in itself, it produces a profound shock in the conventionally



Don Jaime with his fetish – his dead wife's wedding trousseau

devout; and its intention is very clear to anyone who knows the significance for the Surrealists of Millet's 'The Oration of the Angelus'.

The '*leitmotif* object', which has always been prominent in Surrealism and in Buñuel's cinema, is particularly stressed in *Viridiana*. An example is the skipping rope, with its wooden handles of clearly phallic allusion. In Surrealist terms it would be called an 'object of multiple uses': the child skips in the garden with the rope which old Don Jaime has given her, so that he can admire her erotically; later Don Jaime commits suicide with it, finding in death the substitute for his frustrated libido; the child returns to skipping with it, beneath the hanging tree, even though she is told that it will bring bad luck and shows a lack of respect for the dead. (In spite of superstition, ignoring death, the rhythm of life continues.) The beggar who attempts to rape Viridiana uses the rope as a belt. *Viridiana* is of all the films richest in such details. Viridiana peels an apple, obsessively letting the peel fall in a spiral: the tics, the details without any apparent sense of significance, because always it is necessary to seek these in the subconscious, help to fill the films of Buñuel with a sense of mystery, of vague fatality, of empty spaces, of enigmas which no other director would accommodate, but which are at bottom Buñuel's causative truths.

We are in a world that is obsessive and obsessed: Don Jaime, the rich



Viridiana: the beggars' Last Supper ...

landowner ruled by his inhibitions, trapped by the sexual tabu to which the death of his bride on his wedding night delivered him – a prototype of bourgeois convention, like the protagonist of *El*, though his neurosis is less grave and more amiable; *Viridiana* with her Christian ideals and her chastity carried like a burden, sleepwalking, burning her knitting in ritual gestures as the protagonist of *L'Age d'or* plucks feathers. But *Viridiana* has two faces. The strange and the aberrant are confronted by the implacable logic of the film itself. Buñuel continues to be above all a Surrealist.

The second part of the film is dominated by the twelve beggars, in whom the duality is elaborated. They are normal with respect to one another; but in other respects monstrous. Physically they are grotesque, socially they are destitute, psychologically they are deceived and exploited. Hence their ill faith, their mistrust, their pride. It is pure Buñuel that during their party they compose a plastic image which caricatures Leonardo's 'Last Supper', which a female beggar 'photographs' with an obscene gesture. That they dance *sevillanas* is inevitable; that they dance them with the only available gramophone record in the house, Handel's *Messiah*, is also logical – and also Buñuel. In the most natural way in the course of the merrymaking, the old beggar puts on the bridal veil, taken from a cupboard, without any of the sexual sym-



... is 'photographed'

bolism of the moment earlier in the film when Don Jaime put it on to excite himself before a mirror, remembering his dead bride.

With this delirious film Buñuel has given the Spanish cinema the equivalent of Quevedo's *El Buscón* and *Los Sueños*, of the picaresque, of Galdós. It is not the only Spain that he shows us, but it is one of the authentic faces of the country. Buñuel intended no more than to present his vision of Spain. He aims neither to dogmatize nor to generalize; and it takes ill faith to read the film in such a way. Every work of the imagination has ultimately to be based on real fact. To make his nightmare of Spain, *Viridiana*, he had to take a particular type of woman which abounds in our country; an uncle who owns vast estates which lie unproductive – as there certainly are in Spain: it is one of our grave problems; some beggars, who again are for ever with us; some irreverences and blasphemies such as are spoken every day among us. All this is not criticism, but observation – just as is the notorious knife in the form of a crucifix, which was at one time mass-produced in Albacete (see the letter to José Bello reprinted in the Appendix).

The double sense that these things can have in Buñuel is something different again. He discovers the double meaning through the associations of the gymnastic Surrealist mind. Much more than malice or deliberate

blasphemy, it is a matter of an imagination keenly sensitive to the paradoxes of objects, beings and situations, which can acquire unexpected, irreverent or scandalous significances. The quality is already evident in *Un Chien andalou*, a film innocent of abstract propositions. The profoundly revolutionary aspect of *Viridiana* is that it too is an innocent film.

It is necessary to emphasize this point because of the scandal that the film occasioned in Spain. Buñuel set out simply to make a commercial film in Spain. He had his own initial doubts: '... at best they will ban it', he told me; 'or put it on for half a week in an out-of-the-way fleapit where it will achieve neither glory nor blame'. I told him that a worse danger was that the film might be reclassified in the Third Category, which means that it loses the rights of exhibition in good cinemas, and export. This used to happen with pictures of very low artistic quality or of unusual content, or which were in any way not agreeable to the government. Buñuel was alarmed by the suggestion; but the next day came to tell me that the censorship had stressed that there was no danger of this happening.

The Director of Cinema and Theatre was eager that the film should represent Spain at the Cannes Film Festival. When the Festival had actually begun, the film was still being finished. Buñuel had taken a copy, with the separate sound-tracks, to Paris to do the mixing there, since this is one of the technical aspects in which our cinema industry is inadequate. The producers promised to do everything possible to have the film ready in time. Mixing was finished five days before the end of the Festival. The producers explained quite honestly that there was no time to send the film to Madrid for viewing by the Selection Committee for Festivals and afterwards reach Cannes in time. The authorities, who had approved the script almost without objection and who had selected the film for Cannes, after a viewing without dialogue or sound, decided, without seeing the final version, to authorize sending *Viridiana* directly to the Festival. It was the official Spanish entry. Buñuel remained in Paris and warned the present writer not to go to Cannes. The Director of Cinema and Theatre went up on stage to collect the awards won by Spain, of which there were four: for *Fuego en Castilla*, a Surrealist film by Val del Omar, for Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's *La mano en la trampa*, another UNINCI film; and the French critics' prize of the French press, as well as the 'Palme d'or' for *Viridiana*.

The copy shown was the integral version of the scenario approved by the censorship, which had been modified in one important point from the version initially submitted. *Viridiana's* final decision to renounce her metaphysical ideals and go to the room of Jorge (the prototype of the normal man and therefore without interest) to give herself up to him, was changed to have *Viridiana* enter the room where he and the maid (now his mistress) were

playing cards, and have *Viridiana* join the game. This modification was made in consequence of suggestions made by the Direction of the Censorship. Buñuel adopted it with delight: 'It is a magnificent ending; much better than the original crude one.' In fact the international critics praised Buñuel for the subtlety and irony of this ending, of which he is not the true author.

It seems possible that the Censorship also wished Buñuel to convert Don Jaime's suicide into a heart attack. Buñuel himself proposed to soften a couple of scenes for the Spanish version: *Viridiana* praying beside the crown of thorns, the nails and the hammer of the Crucifixion; the attempted rape of the heroine. Other scenes, including that of the little girl snatching the crown of thorns from the fire and watching with innocent delight while it burns, were to be suppressed. These emendations did not however take place, because the film was not – and still has not been – shown in Spain. For a time it was forbidden for journalists and critics even to mention the existence of the film. The copies and materials in Spain were blocked; and the copy deposited with the Cannes Festival, which subsequently went on to Venice and Locarno, was used to dupe all the copies that have since been sold or shown.

Spanish reports of the Cannes Festival made no mention of the Palme d'or, the first major prize ever obtained by the Spanish cinema. The Director of Cinema and Theatre was dismissed, and the twenty members of the official Spanish delegation to the Cannes Festival were punished. Meanwhile the fact that Gustavo Alatriste had put up most of the money for the production made it possible legally to claim Mexican nationality for the film; and as such it was shown all over the world, excepting always Spain. Critics everywhere exalted the film, though the scandals surrounding it continued. In January 1963 copies of the film were seized by the Rome and Milan police under article 402 of the Italian penal code which provides sanctions against works which 'condemn the official religion'. The Italian critics protested, and the film was granted the impunity due to a work of art; but *L'Osservatore Romano* resumed the virulent attacks it had opened when the film was initially shown. In England, Surrey banned its showing.

Meanwhile *Viridiana* had turned Buñuel, finally, into a director of popular celebrity and 'box-office'. The huge profits were deposited in a Swiss bank to await the judicial untangling of the rights of the Spanish producers and of Alatriste, whose investments were in the ratio of one to five; Alatriste had put in some five million pesetas of the budget, and subsequently put it into circulation.

Buñuel returned to Mexico somewhat perplexed. Once he had sought scandal and found it. Now he found it without seeking it. This, according to some of the fanatics, is what had brought *Viridiana* to perfection: to be something in essence, and not by seeking.